

Summary of Webinar At Museum of the Bible

The presentation by Professor Notley and Mordechai Aviam was fascinating. Previous to this time, I was not aware of the “dig” and the momentous find of “biblical Bethsaida” at the site of El-Araj on the coast of the Sea of Galilee Israel next to the lake of Gennesaret. Against many scholars who have disputed where this “lost” city was, the Archeological team pressed forward with the location near the Jordan River.

Scripture has recorded “Bethsaida” many times in the Gospels. Philip, Andrew and Peter are reported to be from Bethsaida. It is hoped that this could be the “fishing village” which is also the location of some of Jesus’ miracles. Recent evidence at the site has revealed a bath house in the design of Roman Architecture. Also found is a particular stone called Fenestrated tubuli that is unique to Jewish mosaic construction. But most noteworthy is the revelation of “Inscription” on a tiled floor reported to be from a church built on top of Apostle Simon Peter’s house. This along with a coin of Roman emperor Nero and an oil lamp suggest the Roman era influence at that time and into the Byzantine period.

An important milestone for the Historian Professor Notley was when he found Josephus’ description identifying stones from the bath house next to the Basidia-et-el site and he describes the area as a fishing city. The ancient historian Josephus was wounded in battle and brought to Capernaum. Later, in the eleventh century, Capernaum declined following a flourishing period and then was abandoned.

The stones at the site identified the walls of the church. Of significance to the find is the medallion design on the tile with the inscription “Apostle” which suggests that this is the Byzantine period first century church dedicated to the Apostles. And it is asserted by Professor Notley that Peter is from Bethsaida not Capernaum. It is during the Byzantine era that Christianity blossomed. There were no churches built during the Roman period. At the end of the third century history does not record any correspondence and therefore no “buzz” and neither is there any “Rabbinic Literature” from this time. Theodosius the second, Roman emperor, describes the Bethsaida area to be six miles from Capernaum. Willibald, Bishop of Eistatt, Bavaria describes Bethsaida where there is a church and previously a house which Peter and Andrew are from. During the presentation by Professor Notley and archologist Aviam, they also presented literature from an anonymous pilgrim that traveled through Capernaum and identified the “two streams called Lor and Dan, which join together to form the single stream called Jordan”. Also found below the surface at the site is evidence of a sugar industry from the twelfth century. Then there are about three hundred decorated lead fishing weights found; no doubt that this is an obvious indication of an area where fishing was predominately included as a large part of the areas industry.

Due to the rise and fall of the lake and the streams that wind through the area adjacent to the lake, this causes archeological digging challenges. However, the team is dedicated to finding more evidence and New Discoveries at the el-Araj site.

This dig is important in determining the lost cities of the bible. The question was asked during the presentation “how do you lose a city”? Not only “a city” but one where God had chosen for Jesus’ ministry with miracles and preparing His disciples for the Great Commission.